

addresses this concern by allowing dealers or manufacturers to reject arbitration and seek legal relief for breach of contract.

Since passage of the Federal Arbitration Act in 1925, the Congress has unequivocally encouraged alternative dispute resolution. We will continue to do so. However, we must also periodically examine the efficacy of binding arbitration clauses in exceptional circumstances to ensure that arbitration continues to serve as a fair and efficient alternative to formal litigation. H.R. 534 addresses one such exceptional circumstance, and I urge your support of the bill.

Mr. PASCARELL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of H.R. 534.

This legislation is designed to specifically help automobile dealers, but it is also legislation that will help consumers and our communities at large.

There are 700 new automobile retail businesses throughout New Jersey. Dealerships are located on every highway, and in almost every downtown area throughout the state. I know driving down Route 46, and Route 23, and on other roads, I see dozens of these businesses that are contributing to the betterment of Northern New Jersey.

These small businesses serve as important parts of the community. You can see their names on the backs of youth sports league jerseys and they always provide funds to civic events and fundraising drives.

It is time we in Congress give back on behalf of our communities, and do something to resolve an inequity and promote fairness in the automobile industry.

H.R. 534 merely makes binding arbitration in dealer/manufacture disputes a voluntary option. This is needed legislation to help a segment of the small business community that needs our help.

We must pass this legislation for not only business owners, but for their employees as well.

Automotive retailing in New Jersey accounts for the direct employment of almost 45 thousand workers. There are also 24 thousand workers who indirectly owe their jobs to these businesses in the Garden State. That is 67 thousand workers who will see the benefits this legislation provides.

This legislation is also of great benefit to the consumer, who as we all know, is always looking to get the best possible deal on a car. H.R. 534 promotes competition in an already very competitive industry, yielding the best prices for dealers, and these deals can be passed onto the consumer.

As a member of the House Small Business Committee, I am always looking to help small businesses succeed and grow. Small business is the engine that has brought our economy to where it is today.

This legislation will help one group of small businesses in their pursuit of economic success. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this bill and support it on the floor.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, today we consider legislation intended to protect automobile dealers against binding arbitration clauses in contracts with manufacturers and franchisers. Although it was narrowed in Subcommittee to cover only one industry, it is an important and necessary step, one for which the testimony

we received in the Judiciary Committee certainly makes the case.

Too often, these businesses are presented with contracts on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. If they do not accept the contract, with the binding arbitration clause, they risk losing their franchise and with it years of investment, both financial and the hard work they and their families have put into the business. That is a pretty coercive situation and one which most members of this House rightly view as contracts of adhesion.

Moreover, binding arbitration often deprives these businesses of their rights under State law, and their due process rights in court. Under certain circumstances, binding arbitration even threatens some contractual protections.

Prohibiting this kind of unconscionable coercion is appropriate and I plan to support it.

In addition to leaving other businesses exposed, this bill fails to protect individual consumers who also suffer violations of their rights under binding arbitration clauses in service agreements with sellers, and in credit agreements. During our hearing one witness for the auto dealers did admit that some dealers use these clauses in their contracts with their customers.

Clearly this is a situation which also needs to be remedied. Now that the House has endorsed this fundamental protection for automobile dealers, I hope that the same concern which animates the bipartisan support for this legislation will help bring that bill into law as well.

So while I do not believe this legislation goes far enough, it is an important step to protect small businesses and I urge its passage.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. BONO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. BONO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 534, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend chapter 1 of title 9, United States Code, to provide for greater fairness in the arbitration process relating to motor vehicle franchise contracts."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

STRENGTHENING ABUSE AND NEGLECT COURTS ACT OF 2000

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2272) to improve the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the Nation's abuse and neglect courts and for other purposes consistent with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2272

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Under both Federal and State law, the courts play a crucial and essential role in the Nation's child welfare system and in ensuring safety, stability, and permanence for abused and neglected children under the supervision of that system.

(2) The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89; 111 Stat. 2115) establishes explicitly for the first time in Federal law that a child's health and safety must be the paramount consideration when any decision is made regarding a child in the Nation's child welfare system.

(3) The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 promotes stability and permanence for abused and neglected children by requiring timely decision-making in proceedings to determine whether children can safely return to their families or whether they should be moved into safe and stable adoptive homes or other permanent family arrangements outside the foster care system.

(4) To avoid unnecessary and lengthy stays in the foster care system, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 specifically requires, among other things, that States move to terminate the parental rights of the parents of those children who have been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months.

(5) While essential to protect children and to carry out the general purposes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the accelerated timelines for the termination of parental rights and the other requirements imposed under that Act increase the pressure on the Nation's already overburdened abuse and neglect courts.

(6) The administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the Nation's abuse and neglect courts would be substantially improved by the acquisition and implementation of computerized case-tracking systems to identify and eliminate existing backlogs, to move abuse and neglect caseloads forward in a timely manner, and to move children into safe and stable families. Such systems could also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of such courts in meeting the purposes of the amendments made by, and provisions of, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

(7) The administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the Nation's abuse and neglect courts would also be improved by the identification and implementation of projects designed to eliminate the backlog of abuse and neglect cases, including the temporary hiring of additional judges, extension of court hours, and other projects designed to reduce existing caseloads.

(8) The administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the Nation's abuse and neglect courts would be further strengthened by improving the quality and availability of training for judges, court personnel, agency attorneys, guardians ad litem, volunteers who participate in court-appointed special advocate (CASA) programs, and attorneys who represent the children and the parents of children in abuse and neglect proceedings.

(9) While recognizing that abuse and neglect courts in this country are already committed to the quality administration of justice, the performance of such courts would

be even further enhanced by the development of models and educational opportunities that reinforce court projects that have already been developed, including models for case-flow procedures, case management, representation of children, automated interagency interfaces, and "best practices" standards.

(10) Judges, magistrates, commissioners, and other judicial officers play a central and vital role in ensuring that proceedings in our Nation's abuse and neglect courts are run efficiently and effectively. The performance of those individuals in such courts can only be further enhanced by training, seminars, and an ongoing opportunity to exchange ideas with their peers.

(11) Volunteers who participate in court-appointed special advocate (CASA) programs play a vital role as the eyes and ears of abuse and neglect courts in proceedings conducted by, or under the supervision of, such courts and also bring increased public scrutiny of the abuse and neglect court system. The Nation's abuse and neglect courts would benefit from an expansion of this program to currently underserved communities.

(12) Improved computerized case-tracking systems, comprehensive training, and development of, and education on, model abuse and neglect court systems, particularly with respect to underserved areas, would significantly further the purposes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 by reducing the average length of an abused and neglected child's stay in foster care, improving the quality of decision-making and court services provided to children and families, and increasing the number of adoptions.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(a) **ABUSE AND NEGLECT COURTS.**—The term "abuse and neglect courts" means the State and local courts that carry out State or local laws requiring proceedings (conducted by or under the supervision of the courts)—

(1) that implement part B and part E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 620 et seq.; 670 et seq.) (including preliminary disposition of such proceedings);

(2) that determine whether a child was abused or neglected;

(3) that determine the advisability or appropriateness of placement in a family foster home, group home, or a special residential care facility; or

(4) that determine any other legal disposition of a child in the abuse and neglect court system.

(b) **AGENCY ATTORNEY.**—The term "agency attorney" means an attorney or other individual, including any government attorney, district attorney, attorney general, State attorney, county attorney, city solicitor or attorney, corporation counsel, or privately retained special prosecutor, who represents the State or local agency administering the programs under parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 620 et seq.; 670 et seq.) in a proceeding conducted by, or under the supervision of, an abuse and neglect court, including a proceeding for termination of parental rights.

SEC. 4. GRANTS TO STATE COURTS AND LOCAL COURTS TO AUTOMATE THE DATA COLLECTION AND TRACKING OF PROCEEDINGS IN ABUSE AND NEGLECT COURTS.

(a) **AUTHORITY TO AWARD GRANTS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraph (2), the Attorney General, acting through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Office of Justice Programs, shall award grants in accordance with this section to State courts and local courts for the purposes of—

(A) enabling such courts to develop and implement automated data collection and case-tracking systems for proceedings conducted by, or under the supervision of, an abuse and neglect court;

(B) encouraging the replication of such systems in abuse and neglect courts in other jurisdictions; and

(C) requiring the use of such systems to evaluate a court's performance in implementing the requirements of parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 620 et seq.; 670 et seq.).

(2) **LIMITATIONS.**—

(A) **NUMBER OF GRANTS.**—Not less than 20 nor more than 50 grants may be awarded under this section.

(B) **PER STATE LIMITATION.**—Not more than 2 grants authorized under this section may be awarded per State.

(C) **USE OF GRANTS.**—Funds provided under a grant made under this section may only be used for the purpose of developing, implementing, or enhancing automated data collection and case-tracking systems for proceedings conducted by, or under the supervision of, an abuse and neglect court.

(b) **APPLICATION.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—A State court or local court may submit an application for a grant authorized under this section at such time and in such manner as the Attorney General may determine.

(2) **INFORMATION REQUIRED.**—An application for a grant authorized under this section shall contain the following:

(A) A description of a proposed plan for the development, implementation, and maintenance of an automated data collection and case-tracking system for proceedings conducted by, or under the supervision of, an abuse and neglect court, including a proposed budget for the plan and a request for a specific funding amount.

(B) A description of the extent to which such plan and system are able to be replicated in abuse and neglect courts of other jurisdictions that specifies the common case-tracking data elements of the proposed system, including, at a minimum—

(i) identification of relevant judges, court, and agency personnel;

(ii) records of all court proceedings with regard to the abuse and neglect case, including all court findings and orders (oral and written); and

(iii) relevant information about the subject child, including family information and the reason for court supervision.

(C) In the case of an application submitted by a local court, a description of how the plan to implement the proposed system was developed in consultation with related State courts, particularly with regard to a State court improvement plan funded under section 13712 of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 670 note) if there is such a plan in the State.

(D) In the case of an application that is submitted by a State court, a description of how the proposed system will integrate with a State court improvement plan funded under section 13712 of such Act if there is such a plan in the State.

(E) After consultation with the State agency responsible for the administration of parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 620 et seq.; 670 et seq.)—

(i) a description of the coordination of the proposed system with other child welfare data collection systems, including the Statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS) and the adoption and foster care analysis and reporting system

(AFCARS) established pursuant to section 479 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 679); and

(ii) an assurance that such coordination will be implemented and maintained.

(F) Identification of an independent third party that will conduct ongoing evaluations of the feasibility and implementation of the plan and system and a description of the plan for conducting such evaluations.

(G) A description or identification of a proposed funding source for completion of the plan (if applicable) and maintenance of the system after the conclusion of the period for which the grant is to be awarded.

(H) An assurance that any contract entered into between the State court or local court and any other entity that is to provide services for the development, implementation, or maintenance of the system under the proposed plan will require the entity to agree to allow for replication of the services provided, the plan, and the system, and to refrain from asserting any proprietary interest in such services for purposes of allowing the plan and system to be replicated in another jurisdiction.

(I) An assurance that the system established under the plan will provide data that allows for evaluation (at least on an annual basis) of the following information:

(i) The total number of cases that are filed in the abuse and neglect court.

(ii) The number of cases assigned to each judge who presides over the abuse and neglect court.

(iii) The average length of stay of children in foster care.

(iv) With respect to each child under the jurisdiction of the court—

(I) the number of episodes of placement in foster care;

(II) the number of days placed in foster care and the type of placement (foster family home, group home, or special residential care facility);

(III) the number of days of in-home supervision; and

(IV) the number of separate foster care placements.

(v) The number of adoptions, guardianships, or other permanent dispositions finalized.

(vi) The number of terminations of parental rights.

(vii) The number of child abuse and neglect proceedings closed that had been pending for 2 or more years.

(viii) With respect to each proceeding conducted by, or under the supervision of, an abuse and neglect court—

(I) the timeliness of each stage of the proceeding from initial filing through legal finalization of a permanency plan (for both contested and uncontested hearings);

(II) the number of adjournments, delays, and continuances occurring during the proceeding, including identification of the party requesting each adjournment, delay, or continuance and the reasons given for the request;

(III) the number of courts that conduct or supervise the proceeding for the duration of the abuse and neglect case;

(IV) the number of judges assigned to the proceeding for the duration of the abuse and neglect case; and

(V) the number of agency attorneys, children's attorneys, parent's attorneys, guardians ad litem, and volunteers participating in a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) program assigned to the proceeding during the duration of the abuse and neglect case.

(J) A description of how the proposed system will reduce the need for paper files and ensure prompt action so that cases are appropriately listed with national and regional adoption exchanges, and public and private adoption services.

(K) An assurance that the data collected in accordance with subparagraph (I) will be made available to relevant Federal, State, and local government agencies and to the public.

(L) An assurance that the proposed system is consistent with other civil and criminal information requirements of the Federal government.

(M) An assurance that the proposed system will provide notice of timeframes required under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89; 111 Stat. 2115) for individual cases to ensure prompt attention and compliance with such requirements.

(c) CONDITIONS FOR APPROVAL OF APPLICATIONS.—

(1) MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A State court or local court awarded a grant under this section shall expend \$1 for every \$3 awarded under the grant to carry out the development, implementation, and maintenance of the automated data collection and case-tracking system under the proposed plan.

(B) WAIVER FOR HARDSHIP.—The Attorney General may waive or modify the matching requirement described in subparagraph (A) in the case of any State court or local court that the Attorney General determines would suffer undue hardship as a result of being subject to the requirement.

(C) NON-FEDERAL EXPENDITURES.—

(i) CASH OR IN KIND.—State court or local court expenditures required under subparagraph (A) may be in cash or in kind, fairly evaluated, including plant, equipment, or services.

(ii) NO CREDIT FOR PRE-AWARD EXPENDITURES.—Only State court or local court expenditures made after a grant has been awarded under this section may be counted for purposes of determining whether the State court or local court has satisfied the matching expenditure requirement under subparagraph (A).

(2) NOTIFICATION TO STATE OR APPROPRIATE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY.—No application for a grant authorized under this section may be approved unless the State court or local court submitting the application demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Attorney General that the court has provided the State, in the case of a State court, or the appropriate child welfare agency, in the case of a local court, with notice of the contents and submission of the application.

(3) CONSIDERATIONS.—In evaluating an application for a grant under this section the Attorney General shall consider the following:

(A) The extent to which the system proposed in the application may be replicated in other jurisdictions.

(B) The extent to which the proposed system is consistent with the provisions of, and amendments made by, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89; 111 Stat. 2115), and parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 620 et seq.; 670 et seq.).

(C) The extent to which the proposed system is feasible and likely to achieve the purposes described in subsection (a)(1).

(4) DIVERSITY OF AWARDS.—The Attorney General shall award grants under this section in a manner that results in a reasonable balance among grants awarded to State

courts and grants awarded to local courts, grants awarded to courts located in urban areas and courts located in rural areas, and grants awarded in diverse geographical locations.

(d) LENGTH OF AWARDS.—No grant may be awarded under this section for a period of more than 5 years.

(e) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Funds provided to a State court or local court under a grant awarded under this section shall remain available until expended without fiscal year limitation.

(f) REPORTS.—

(1) ANNUAL REPORT FROM GRANTEEES.—Each State court or local court that is awarded a grant under this section shall submit an annual report to the Attorney General that contains—

(A) a description of the ongoing results of the independent evaluation of the plan for, and implementation of, the automated data collection and case-tracking system funded under the grant; and

(B) the information described in subsection (b)(2)(I).

(2) INTERIM AND FINAL REPORTS FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL.—

(A) INTERIM REPORTS.—Beginning 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, and biannually thereafter until a final report is submitted in accordance with subparagraph (B), the Attorney General shall submit to Congress interim reports on the grants made under this section.

(B) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the termination of all grants awarded under this section, the Attorney General shall submit to Congress a final report evaluating the automated data collection and case-tracking systems funded under such grants and identifying successful models of such systems that are suitable for replication in other jurisdictions. The Attorney General shall ensure that a copy of such final report is transmitted to the highest State court in each State.

(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section, \$10,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2001 through 2005.

SEC. 5. GRANTS TO REDUCE PENDING BACKLOGS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES TO PROMOTE PERMANENCY FOR ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN.

(a) AUTHORITY TO AWARD GRANTS.—The Attorney General, acting through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Office of Justice Programs and in collaboration with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall award grants in accordance with this section to State courts and local courts for the purposes of—

(1) promoting the permanency goals established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89; 111 Stat. 2115); and

(2) enabling such courts to reduce existing backlogs of cases pending in abuse and neglect courts, especially with respect to cases to terminate parental rights and cases in which parental rights to a child have been terminated but an adoption of the child has not yet been finalized.

(b) APPLICATION.—A State court or local court shall submit an application for a grant under this section, in such form and manner as the Attorney General shall require, that contains a description of the following:

(1) The barriers to achieving the permanency goals established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 that have been identified.

(2) The size and nature of the backlogs of children awaiting termination of parental rights or finalization of adoption.

(3) The strategies the State court or local court proposes to use to reduce such backlogs and the plan and timetable for doing so.

(4) How the grant funds requested will be used to assist the implementation of the strategies described in paragraph (3).

(c) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds provided under a grant awarded under this section may be used for any purpose that the Attorney General determines is likely to successfully achieve the purposes described in subsection (a), including temporarily—

(1) establishing night court sessions for abuse and neglect courts;

(2) hiring additional judges, magistrates, commissioners, hearing officers, referees, special masters, and other judicial personnel for such courts;

(3) hiring personnel such as clerks, administrative support staff, case managers, mediators, and attorneys for such courts; or

(4) extending the operating hours of such courts.

(d) NUMBER OF GRANTS.—Not less than 15 nor more than 20 grants shall be awarded under this section.

(e) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Funds awarded under a grant made under this section shall remain available for expenditure by a grantee for a period not to exceed 3 years from the date of the grant award.

(f) REPORT ON USE OF FUNDS.—Not later than the date that is halfway through the period for which a grant is awarded under this section, and 90 days after the end of such period, a State court or local court awarded a grant under this section shall submit a report to the Attorney General that includes the following:

(1) The barriers to the permanency goals established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 that are or have been addressed with grant funds.

(2) The nature of the backlogs of children that were pursued with grant funds.

(3) The specific strategies used to reduce such backlogs.

(4) The progress that has been made in reducing such backlogs, including the number of children in such backlogs—

(A) whose parental rights have been terminated; and

(B) whose adoptions have been finalized.

(5) Any additional information that the Attorney General determines would assist jurisdictions in achieving the permanency goals established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATION.—There are authorized to be appropriated for the period of fiscal years 2001 and 2002 \$10,000,000 for the purpose of making grants under this section.

SEC. 6. GRANTS TO EXPAND THE COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE PROGRAM IN UNDERSERVED AREAS.

(a) GRANTS TO EXPAND CASA PROGRAMS IN UNDERSERVED AREAS.—The Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Department of Justice shall make a grant to the National Court-Appointed Special Advocate Association for the purposes of—

(1) expanding the recruitment of, and building the capacity of, court-appointed special advocate programs located in the 15 largest urban areas;

(2) developing regional, multijurisdictional court-appointed special advocate programs serving rural areas; and

(3) providing training and supervision of volunteers in court-appointed special advocate programs.

(b) LIMITATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENDITURES.—Not more than 5 percent of the

grant made under this subsection may be used for administrative expenditures.

(C) DETERMINATION OF URBAN AND RURAL AREAS.—For purposes of administering the grant authorized under this subsection, the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Department of Justice shall determine whether an area is one of the 15 largest urban areas or a rural area in accordance with the practices of, and statistical information compiled by, the Bureau of the Census.

(D) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to make the grant authorized under this section, \$5,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2001 and 2002.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on S. 2272.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, S. 2272, the Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000, provides grants to allow States to improve the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of child abuse and neglect courts throughout the Nation. The bill gives the Attorney General the authority to award grants to State and local courts; to provide computerized case tracking and technical assistance; promote innovative strategies to reduce case loads; and provide additional court-appointed special advocates to assist in supporting children and courts.

Every child should have the opportunity to be whatever it is they want to be, and it is our responsibility as a community and as parents to provide them a nurturing environment so that every child can fulfill their great promise.

The act of child abuse is incomprehensible to all of us. Child abuse steals the innocence from our coming generation. The victims of child abuse are not allowed to be children; they become adults all too soon. We must give the States the tools to assist them in protecting our children.

Child welfare is an example where State law is generally paramount. The Federal Government supports State action by providing funds to States for child welfare activities. Grants to States have been used to expand and strengthen child welfare services. This bill is finely tuned to assist States in this regard.

We must come together as a Nation to restore what has been stolen from

this generation. We must come together as a Nation to prevent and stop the cycle of this terrible abuse.

I want to thank Senator DEWINE of Ohio for bringing this important bill forward, and I hope everyone will support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, while we seem to be making some progress reducing the overall crime rate in this country, crimes against children, particularly reports of child abuse and neglect, have grown by 41 percent over the last 10 years. In 1997, Congress passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act to begin the process for accelerating time lines and making other improvements designed to speed up the process of securing safe, permanent, caring families for abused and neglected children.

Unfortunately, in passing the law, Congress failed to recognize the additional burdens of these time lines and other improvements would exact on the already overburdened family and domestic relations courts. Courts nationwide are struggling to meet the accelerated time lines and other requirements of that legislation and, as a result, there are substantial backlogs in processing of these cases.

This bill, which is supported by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, will help to further the goals of the Adoption and Safe Families Act by authorizing \$10 million over 5 years to assist State and local courts in developing and implementing automated case tracking systems for abused and neglect proceedings. It also authorizes an additional \$10 million to reduce existing backlogs of abuse and neglect cases and \$5 million to expand the Court-Appointed Special Advocate, CASA, program into underserved areas.

Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with this program. They have several programs in Virginia. CASA volunteers do an excellent job in assisting children in the court system, and I am delighted we are expanding this system in the legislation.

In sum, this bill authorizes a total of \$25 million to address this pressing problem. I acknowledge that this is just a drop in the bucket of what is necessary. However, it will help to alleviate an overburdened family court system. And I encourage my colleagues not to stop here.

The research tells us that children who experience abuse are four times more likely to be involved in delinquent and criminal activity than a child who has not been abused. Furthermore, those children are more likely to be arrested 1 year earlier, commit twice as many offenses and be arrested

more frequently than youths who are not abused or neglected.

But the statistic that should most concern us is that nearly 70 percent of youths arrested have a prior history of abuse and neglect, which means that we already have the ability to identify those children at risk of delinquency through child protection and child welfare systems. By identifying those children and providing them with appropriate intervention programs and services, we can drastically decrease juvenile delinquency.

As the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Crime, I must express my regret that this Congress has not made these improvements in proven crime prevention initiatives a priority. H.R. 1501, the Consequences for Juvenile Offenders Act, and H.R. 1150, which reauthorizes the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act as originally introduced in the House, would have provided increased funding for juvenile crime prevention programs and services for at-risk youth.

These bills were loaded down in the House with slogans and sound bites posing as amendments and then buried in a conference committee that has not met for a year. It is unfortunate that this Congress chose to play politics instead of choosing to address the problem of at-risk youth in this country and to reduce juvenile crime.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the passage of the measure before us today. It is a good start and will provide family courts with resources they need to enhance their tracking systems and to begin reducing backlogs.

I look forward to working with my friends across the aisle next year on juvenile justice legislation that builds upon the foundation started today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield such time as she may consume to the distinguished gentleman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE).

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I thank the honorable and distinguished chairman for yielding me time and for his assistance in this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this measure, the Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act, or SANCA. There is nothing more tragic than the thought of a child who has been abused or neglected, and nothing happier than a child finding the warmth and love of a permanent adoptive family. Unfortunately, the period of time between these two points during which a child's case is pending before the courts can be a period of interminable delays, bureaucratic snags, and a less-than-thorough accurate review of the child's case, all of which can have a lasting negative effect on the child.

□ 1745

Mr. Speaker, for those children who reach adulthood without permanent placement and transition out of the foster care system, they begin their adult lives with no sense of family, low self-esteem and little direction for the future. Children are being removed from abusive homes only to be abused once again by the system.

Healing can only begin for these children when they are in a safe and permanent environment. But all too often these children languish in the foster care system in a state of emotional limbo.

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, between 1991 and 1997, in my own home district of Franklin County, Ohio, 38 percent of the children who are waiting permanent adoption because parental rights have been severed have been in the system over 4 years. And nationally, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, children who are adopted from foster care leave the system between 3.5 and 5.5 years later.

This is simply too long for these children to wait for the love and warmth of a permanent family. This is a good part of a childhood.

Congress began to address this situation in 1997 with the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Without a doubt this is one of our crowning achievements of the last session. But while ASFA's accelerated timelines are essential to promoting stability and permanence for abused and neglected children, these timelines, along with grossly insufficient funding, have resulted in continued prolonged stays for abused and neglected children in the foster care system and increased pressure on our Nation's already overburdened abuse and neglect courts.

SANCA addresses the shortfalls of the Adoption and Safe Families Act by making Federal funding available to State and local courts to reduce case backlogs and to develop and implement automated case tracking systems for abuse and neglect proceedings.

SANCA also provides funding for start-up grants to appoint the Court Appointed Special Advocate for CASA, programs in underserved areas.

The foster care system cannot help abused and neglected children without properly functioning State and local courts. The relatively small amount of funding provided by SANCA will have a dramatic impact on the lives of abused and neglected children.

SANCA is backed by the American Bar Association, the Conference of Chief Justices, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, among others. Clearly, this legislation is of vital importance to abused and neglected children who need nothing more than the stability and love that comes with the safe and permanent home. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues' support.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will have the short-term effect of reducing backlogs but will have the long-term effect of improving the lives of many children. I want to thank the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE), the distinguished chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary for bringing the bill to the floor and thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) for her advocacy on this issue. She is a former judge and is very knowledgeable on this issue. I thank her for her advocacy on behalf of children.

Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, the strengthening Abuse and neglect Courts Act of 2000 will build on the success of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) which required states to shorten the length of time that children remain in foster care by filing termination of parental rights petitions at 15 months.

Implementation of ASFA has resulted in an unprecedented 64 percent increase in adoptions out of foster care since 1996.

As a direct result of ASFA, developed by the Committee on Ways and means, new pressures have been put on state courts to hold permanency hearings, implement permanency plans, make judicial findings and finalize adoptions cases involving abused and neglected children in a timely fashion.

The Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000 will increase the efficiency and capacity of the nation's abuse and neglect courts by providing funds to state courts to computerize a data collection and case tracking system. This system will allow judges to track the number of children under judicial care to monitor how these children are faring. A case tracking system will allow judges to keep a running account of the number and type of services offered to the family and the results of these interventions. This information is critical to keeping children safe and promoting permanency.

This Act will enable state and local courts to reduce existing backlogs of children awaiting termination of parental rights or finalization of adoption. According to the Department of Health and Human Services there were over 103,000 children awaiting adoption in 1998. Grants provided to state courts under this Act will allow courts to hire additional judges to hear these cases and to establish night court sessions for hearing these cases.

The Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000 is a logical next step to the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. We need courts that work to reduce delays and keep children safe and in loving families. This legislation does that and I wholeheartedly support it.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2272.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMENDING IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT WITH REGARD TO BRINGING IN AND HARBORING CERTAIN ALIENS

Mr. ROGAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 238) to amend section 274 of the Immigration and Nationality Act to impose mandatory minimum sentences, and increase certain sentences, for bringing in and harboring certain aliens, and to amend title 18, United States Code, to provide enhanced penalties for persons committing such offenses while armed, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 238

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. INCREASED PERSONNEL FOR INVESTIGATING AND COMBATING ALIEN SMUGGLING.

The Attorney General in each of the fiscal years 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 shall increase the number of positions for full-time, active duty investigators or other enforcement personnel within the Immigration and Naturalization Service who are assigned to combating alien smuggling by not less than 50 positions above the number of such positions for which funds were allotted for the preceding fiscal year.

SEC. 2. INCREASING CRIMINAL SENTENCES AND FINES FOR ALIEN SMUGGLING.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (b), pursuant to its authority under section 994(p) of title 28, United States Code, the United States Sentencing Commission shall promulgate sentencing guidelines or amend existing sentencing guidelines for smuggling, transporting, harboring, or inducing aliens under sections 274(a)(1)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1324(a)(1)(A)) so as to—

(1) double the minimum term of imprisonment under that section for offenses involving the smuggling, transporting, harboring, or inducing of—

(A) 1 to 5 aliens from 10 months to 20 months;

(B) 6 to 24 aliens from 18 months to 36 months;

(C) 25 to 100 aliens from 27 months to 54 months; and

(D) 101 aliens or more from 37 months to 74 months;

(2) increase the minimum level of fines for each of the offenses described in subparagraphs (A) through (D) of paragraph (1) to the greater of the current minimum level or twice the amount the defendant received or expected to receive as compensation for the illegal activity; and

(3) increase by at least 2 offense levels above the applicable enhancement in effect on the date of enactment of this Act the sentencing enhancements for intentionally or recklessly creating a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or causing bodily injury, serious injury, permanent or life threatening injury, or death.